



February 21st, 2023

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of HB 6618

Dear Senator Herron, Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Representative Dathan and members of the Human Services Committee:

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of HB 6618, Act Concerning Medical Assistance For Certain Persons Receiving Abortion Care And Related Services In Connecticut. We appreciate your raising this important legislation, and look forward to your work to improve Women's Rights and Reproductive Wellness.

We support this move to provide state-administered medical assistance for certain out-of-state residents receiving abortion care and related services in Connecticut. A recent paper published in JAMA Psychiatry emphasizes the risk of pregnant people's mental health, as well as the well-being of their developing fetuses, when abortion is not accessible. Restricting women's access to safe and legal abortion services has important negative health implications. We've seen that these laws do not result in fewer abortions. Instead, they compel women to risk their lives and health by seeking out unsafe abortion care. Previous research has found that people seeking abortions are three times more likely to have a mental illness.

According to the paper, people with unwanted pregnancies already face myriad pressures that undermine their mental health. Without access to abortion, their mental health could decline even further. Poor mental health in the mother is an important predictor of negative birth outcomes and neurodevelopmental issues when the baby is born. The U. S. is in the midst of a suicide epidemic. And American motherhood has long presented a bleak reality: The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate in the wealthy world, and more than 50,000 mothers suffer life-altering injuries giving birth each year. New mothers recover from birth in a society without paid parental leave, in which a quarter of women return to work within 2 weeks of giving birth. Without federally guaranteed access to quality childcare, many do so while worrying that their babies may be unsafe.

Recent studies estimated that banning abortion in the U.S. would lead to a 21% increase in the number of pregnancy-related deaths overall and a 33% increase among Black women, simply because staying pregnant is more dangerous than having an abortion. Increased deaths due to unsafe abortions or attempted abortions would be in addition to these estimates. If the current trend persists, "back alley" abortions will be the last resource for women with no access to safe and legal services, and the horrific consequences of such abortions will become a major cause of death and severe health complications for some of the most vulnerable women in this country.

The legal status of abortion also defines whether girls will be able to complete their education and whether women will be able to participate in the workforce, and in public and political life. Improving social safety net programs for women reduces gender gaps and improves girls' and women's health and chances to fulfill their potential, and could help reduce the number of abortions over time. Women who are better educated, have better access to comprehensive reproductive health care, and are employed and fairly remunerated will be better positioned to avoid a mistimed and unwanted pregnancy, hence the need for termination will become less common.

We contend that abortion access is a human right, especially access to a safe abortion. A woman or girl or anyone who is able to bear a child should not be forced as the implications are very serious. Access to safe abortion is included in a constellation of rights, including the rights to life, liberty, privacy, equality and non-discrimination, and freedom from cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Human rights bodies have repeatedly condemned restrictive abortion laws as being incompatible with human rights norms. We look forward to your support and passing of HB 6618.

In closing, as you listen to the testimonies being shared, we urge you to consider the viability of democracy when someone who does not speak English as a first language or needs communication support services such as sign language is only afforded 3 mins to share their testimony. Kindly acknowledge that access to healthcare includes being able to effectively and efficiently share thought, which will prove difficult if there is a lack of resources and time, both of which can feel like a cage to someone who is only trying to share their story. We appreciate the time, effort and courage which you put into your work to represent us, and are asking for you to consider how improving language and time access will increase our participation and support of your endeavors of improving our communities during the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Black and Brown United in Action